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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the relationships between conflict message strategy utilization and the criterion variables of communication satisfaction and interpersonal solidarity in situations of interpersonal conflict. Subjects were 114 college students and their "willing" conversational partners. Each subject completed a questionnaire concerning a conflict he or she had had with the conversational partner, an interpersonal conflict tactics and strategies scale, an interpersonal communication satisfaction inventory, and an interpersonal solidarity scale. Analysis of the data revealed that the use of constructive message strategies in interpersonal conflict tended to produce positive affective outcomes--specifically, interpersonal communication satisfaction and interpersonal solidarity. By the same token, the use of destructive or avoidance conflict message strategies was significantly less likely to yield satisfaction and solidarity, and might even have inhibited such outcomes. (FL)

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COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION AND INTERPERSONAL SOLIDARITY AS OUTCOMES OF CONFLICT MESSAGE STRATEGY USE

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The selection and implementation of appropriate and effective messages constitute the hallmark of competent communication. Hence, communication scholars are uniquely concerned with the strategic message choices of communicators (Clark & Delia, 1979). Since the landmark study of compliance-gaining techniques by Miller, Boster, Roloff, and Seibold in 1977, communication journals have reflected a renewed commitment to the investigation of message strategies. Recent work has chiefly focused on the development of message strategy typologies (Miller et al., 1977; Falbo, 1977; Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Cody, McLaughlin, & Jordan, 1980; Schenck-Hamlin, Wiseman, & Georgacarakos, 1980; Cody, McLaughlin, & Schneider, 1981) and on the identification of psychological and situational influences on strategy selection (Miller et al., 1977; Roloff & Barnicott, 1978; Roloff & Barnicott, 1979; Clark, 1979; McLaughlin, Cody, & Robey, 1980; Lustig & King, 1980; Cody et al., 1981). An important consideration that has been largely ignored is the determination of what message strategies are effective or competent in particular communicative situations. Specifically, there is a dearth of research which links message strategy selection to relevant outcome variables. As Hecht (1978a) has argued, the study of communication variables "will not prove theoretically fruitful unless they can be juxtaposed to communication outcomes" (p. 253). A thorough understanding of communication process necessitates the conceptual and empirical linkage with relevant outcomes. To ignore outcomes is to ignore a vital and fundamental component of communication study: the effects of communicative interaction. The purpose of the present research is to investigate relationships between strategy choices and outcomes in a particular communication context.

Interpersonal Conflict Message Strategies

It is widely recognized that social situation exerts a significant influence on communication behavior. Messages can only be appropriately interpreted in terms of the context in which they are embedded. Consequently, message strategies must be studied systematically with respect to situational context.

One important situational context in which strategic message selection occurs is interpersonal conflict--which may be defined as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals and/or scarce resources (Frost & Wilmot, 1978). Research by Powell (1979) suggests that interpersonal conflict is a situational cluster of dimensions; i.e., a higher order situational form that exhibits unique communication patterns (different from other situational forms). Recent studies on communication strategies in conflict situations have linked the selection of such strategies to such variables as attributional bias (Sillars, 1980a, 1980b), gender (Roloff & Greenberg, 1979; Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979), sources of social influence (Roloff & Greenberg, 1980), relational intimacy (Cupach, 1980), and relational satisfaction (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b). Of particular relevance to the current research is literature bearing upon (1) the development and testing of conflict message strategy typologies, and (2) the impact of strategy selection on outcome variables.

Strategy Typologies

Several authors have recently demonstrated interest in the development of general compliance-gaining strategy typologies (Miller et al., 1977; Falbo, 1977; Falbo & Peplau, 1979; Cody et al., 1980; Schenck-Hamlin et al., 1980; Cody et al., 1981). But few strategy

typologies are specific to interpersonal conflict situations. Although interpersonal conflict involves a large degree of compliance-gaining activity, it may also involve behaviors (such as avoidance) not contained in general compliance-gaining typologies. Since the isomorphism between compliance-gaining techniques and conflict techniques is imperfect, conflict strategy typologies are likely to be more precise for studying interpersonal conflict than extant "compliance-gaining" typologies.

Most discussions of conflict assert or imply a distinction between constructive and destructive processes (e.g., Deutsch, 1969, 1973; Frost & Wilmot, 1978). Consistent with this distinction, Roloff (1976) developed a typology of conflict resolution modes. His analogous distinction was between prosocial and antisocial strategies. "The prosocial mode of conflict resolution represented the ways in which people can resolve conflict through open and rational discussion; it included forgiveness, honesty, and understanding" (Roloff, 1976, p. 179). Antisocial modes of conflict resolution consisted of attempts to gain compliance through force or deception, including revenge, regression, verbal aggression, and physical aggression.

Another typology of interpersonal conflict strategies was reported by Fitzpatrick and Winke (1979). They performed factor analysis on the Interpersonal Conflict Scale (ICS) developed by Kipnis (1976). The ICS consists of 44 self-report items about the use of various conflict tactics. Fitzpatrick and Winke discovered five strategic categories: (1) manipulation; (2) non-negotiation; (3) emotional appeal; (4) personal rejection; and (5) empathic understanding.

Two recent schemes to assess conflict strategies reflect considerable similarity. Cupach (1980) constructed a 42-item self-report questionnaire relevant to interpersonal conflict and "relatively comprehensive in terms of potential behaviors relevant to that context" (p. 9). Factor analysis revealed that specific conflict tactics arrayed into three general conflict strategy groups. The factors were labeled destructive strategies (e.g., insults, threats, force, sarcasm), constructive strategies (e.g., compromise, cooperate, negotiate), and avoidance strategies (e.g., change the subject, ignore the conflict).

Sillars (1980a) independently developed a typology of conflict resolution strategies strikingly similar to the dimensions produced in the Cupach (1980) study. The categories included distributive strategies which "refer to explicit acknowledgement and discussion of conflict which promotes individual over mutual outcomes by seeking concessions or expressing a negative evaluation of the partner" (Sillars, 1980a, p. 181-182); integrative strategies which reflect neutral or positive affect, mutual action, and information exchange; and passive-indirect "strategies which minimize explicit acknowledgement of and communication about conflicts. These are strategies which suppress conflicts, ignore conflicts, or communicate about conflicts indirectly or ambiguously" (p. 181).

Sillars (1980a) indicates that these strategies reflect two dimensions of communication--information exchange and individual versus mutual goal attainment. Furthermore, these dimensions are discussed or implied in the works of several scholars, including Blake and Mouton (1970), Falbo (1977), Falbo and Peplau (1980), Kilmann and Thomas (1975), Pruitt and Lewis (1977), Roloff (1976, 1981),

and Walton and McKersie (1965).

Outcomes of Strategy Use

There is a paucity of research examining the link between interpersonal conflict message strategies and relevant outcome variables. Koren, Carlton, and Shaw (1980) recently concluded that "surprisingly few studies have focused on relations between specific conflict behaviors and the outcomes or consequences of conflict. Thus, little is known about behaviors that optimize the resolution of conflict or contribute to feelings of satisfaction at its termination" (p. 460). Smith (1981) suggests that this is because of an "over reliance on research methods that are well suited to the easily quantified outcomes of distributive bargaining, but are poorly suited to more complicated perceptual outcomes of integrative bargaining" (p. 2). Such perceptual outcomes that are associated with prosocial behavior seem to be particularly salient in situations of interpersonal conflict where the interactants are concerned with both personal and relational goals.

Conflict literature generally considers prosocial/integrative/constructive/"Win-Win" strategies to be superior in terms of effectiveness (Burke, 1970; Deutsch, 1973; Filley, 1975; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Pruitt & Lewis, 1977; Roloff, 1976, 1981; Warschaw, 1980). This seems particularly true for conflict in interpersonal relationships because the conflict process (i.e., communication strategies and tactics) directly affects relational development and stability (Braiker & Kelly, 1979; Cupach, 1980; Krain, 1975; Roloff, 1976). A conflict handled in a prosocial manner not only enhances outcome potential, but also provides a superior antecedent condition for future disputes between the parties (Filley, 1975; Roloff, 1981).

In short, in an interpersonal conflict, parties are concerned with the issue of dispute, and with the future of the interpersonal relationship.

In a study of roommate conflicts, Sillars (1980a) found that integrative conflict strategies were associated with greater satisfaction with the partner and a greater likelihood of conflict resolution than were distributive or passive strategies. Use of integrative strategies was negatively associated with conflict duration. These results are corroborated somewhat by the findings of Falbo and Peplau (1980). They discovered that personal satisfaction with the relationship was strongly associated with the use of direct power strategies, whereas "less satisfied individuals are likely to use more indirect strategies, such as hinting" (p. 625). Koren, Carlton, and Shaw (1980) found that "couples who were satisfied with outcomes tended to show responsiveness to each other's influence efforts and minimize the use of criticism" (p. 464). Similarly, conflict resolution was significantly predicted by responsiveness, minimal criticism, and exploration of possible solutions. Furthermore, it was found that marital distress added a reliably unique contribution to the prediction of the outcome variables, above and beyond the behavioral measures. The authors interpret this finding as suggesting "that a couple's overall view of the marriage is a major contextual factor in the success or failure of a given conflict interaction" (Koren et al., 1980, p. 466). Consistent with these findings, the proliferation of research on marital adjustment and satisfaction suggests that the most distinguishing characteristic of happily married couples is their ability to effectively manage conflict (Gottman, 1979).

The few studies that have included conflict outcomes such as satisfaction, have typically measured those variables with single-item scales. The current research intends to extend upon previous efforts by including multi-item outcome measures that (1) demonstrate high reliability, and (2) are conceptually related to interpersonal communication processes.

Hypotheses

Constructive message strategies reflect a commitment to the dual goals of self and relationship. It is expected that the use of such strategies by interpersonal partners will result in positive affect. Even if the outcome of a conflict is somewhat dissatisfying, the use of constructive strategies should be relatively more pleasing (or less undesirable) than other strategies. In particular, an individual should be relatively more satisfied with the process of communication (i.e., the interaction) when constructive strategies are chosen, as compared to destructive or avoidance strategies.

H1: One's communication satisfaction will be more positively associated with one's reported use of constructive conflict message strategies than with destructive or avoidance conflict message strategies.

H2: The communication satisfaction of one's conversational partner will be more positively associated with one's reported use of constructive conflict message strategies than with destructive or avoidance conflict message strategies.

In addition to enhancing satisfaction with the interaction, the enactment of prosocial/constructive behaviors should have a positive impact on relational perceptions. It is widely recognized that conflict is an intrinsic feature of most interpersonal relationships. Ironically, as couples become more intimate, there is an increasing proclivity to experience conflict due to increased knowledge, interdependence, and interaction. The experience of

such conflict is not necessarily inimical. In fact, some scholars argue that at least a modicum of conflict is necessary to achieve stable intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Bach & Wyden, 1968; Oden, 1974). Whether this is true or not, it is certain that many happy and satisfied couples experience significant conflict. What is critical is the manner in which couples manage interpersonal conflict. In general, relational growth and development are contingent upon the ability of interactants to handle conflict in a constructive and productive fashion.

Interpersonal solidarity represents the affective domain of interpersonal relationships. It reflects the perceived closeness of dyad-members and is associated with criterial attributes of perceived homophily, interpersonal attraction, feeling good, trust, self-disclosure, and relational safety (Prisbell, 1980, 1981; Wheeless, 1976, 1978). To the extent that these attributes would be stifled by destructive message strategies, interpersonal solidarity would also be eroded. By the same token, the use of constructive message strategies should generally facilitate positive relational perceptions.

H3: Interpersonal solidarity will be more positively associated with the use of constructive conflict message strategies than with destructive or avoidance message strategies.

Behavior in a particular conversational encounter will presumably predict each interactant's level of communication satisfaction. But the research of Koren et al. (1980) suggests that overall perceptions of the relationship should also affect the outcome of an interaction. While such perceptions will mediate behavior to some extent, the findings of Koren and his colleagues imply that relationship perceptions exert some additional unique effect on interaction outcomes. Thus, overall perceptions of the interpersonal relationship

constitute a contextual factor that should significantly contribute to the prediction of communication outcomes when added to the predictor of communication behaviors. Based on the research of Koren et al. (1980), the following hypothesis is advanced:

> H4: Interpersonal solidarity will add a unique contribution to the prediction of communication satisfaction when added to a linear combination of conflict message strategies; (i.e., the squared semi-partial correlation between interpersonal solidarity and communication satisfaction will be .05 or higher).

Method

Respondents

One hundred fourteen student volunteers were obtained from communication courses at two universities and one community college in the Southwestern U.S. Each student was asked to find a willing conversational partner from outside of class to participate with them in a "take-home" survey. Thus, there were 228 respondents in all, constituting 114 dyads. Of this group, approximately 55 percent were female. About 73 percent of the sample fell within the age group of 16-25 years. The dyadic relationships reported by individual respondents included spouse (16.2%), romantic intimate (34.2%), close friend (18.9%), friend (7.5%), and relative (10.5%).

Procedures

Student volunteers were offered class credit for participating in this study. In all, 166 questionnaire packets were distributed. Of these, 129 were returned (77.7%), and 114 were adequately completed for data analysis purposes (68.7%). Volunteers were instructed as follows:

> Enclosed in this packet is a take-home survey. Specifically, you are requested to choose someone from outside of class to answer the enclosed questionnaires with you. The partner that you choose should be someone that you (a) know fairly well, and (b) interact with on a fairly regular basis. This person

> might be a friend, a relative, a roommate, an intimate, a co-worker, etc. The person should not be a casual acquaintance or stranger. Enclosed are two identical questionnaires-- one for you and one for your chosen partner to fill out. Specific instructions are included with each questionnaire; please read them carefully. When you and your partner are finished responding to all of the questions, each of you is to seal your questionnaire in one of the smaller envelopes enclosed in this packet. Then place both of the smaller envelopes (containing the completed questionnaire) in this packet and return to your instructor as soon as possible--preferably the next class, but definitely within a week. All responses are strictly anonymous.

Students were also told that they could receive a summary of the research results by submitting their names and address to their instructor on a separate sheet of paper.

Each individual questionnaire consisted of general instructions, one open-ended question, 161 semantic differential and Likert-type scales, and five demographic items. Some of the scales were not directly germane to the current report, and the corresponding findings are reported elsewhere.

Instruments

The first set of questions focused dyad-members on a specific interpersonal conflict that they experienced. The instructions read:

> The following questions are in reference to a recent conflict (i.e., significant disagreement) that you and your partner have had with one another. You should be thinking of the same conflict episode as your partner. Therefore, discuss with each other what particular situation you will be referring to in this questionnaire. It is important that both you and your partner refer to the same situation and time frame. WHEN you have agreed on a particular conflict, THEN answer the questions below individually (on your own).

Respondents were then asked to describe the topic of their conflict and to indicate on semantic-differential scales their perceptions of the importance of the issue and the appropriateness and effectiveness of their own and their partner's behavior.

Next, respondents completed a revised version of the interpersonal

conflict tactics and strategies (ICTAS) scale (Cupach, 1980). This instrument contained 55 statements representing descriptions of the respondent's potential behavior in an interpersonal conflict situation. Respondents indicated on seven-interval scales the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that each item described their behavior in the particular recalled conflict. In a prior study, a 42-item version of ICTAS factored into three conflict strategy categories: destructive (e.g., insult the other person, use threats, throw something); constructive (e.g., cooperate with the other person, compromise with the other person, trust the other person); and avoidance (e.g., try to change the subject, avoid the other person, ignore the issue) (Cupach, 1980). Thirteen items were added to ICTAS for the present study to (1) increase the comprehensiveness of potential conflict behaviors represented by the scale, and (2) increase reliability coefficients for each of the three factors.

ICTAS scale items were submitted to principal factor analysis with orthogonal rotation. The number of rotated factors was based upon two criteria: (1) a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0, and (2) Cattell's (1966) scree procedure. Both three- and four-factor Varimax solutions were interpreted. In the four-factor solution, factors one and two were clearly interpreted as destructive strategies and constructive strategies respectively. Factor three consisted of items such as "trick the other person," "try to embarass the other person," "tease the other person, " and "try to make the other person jealous." This factor was labeled <u>active avoidance</u>. Factor four included the following items: "avoid the other person," "avoid the issue," "try to postpone the issue as long as possible," and "ignore the issue." This dimension was considered a <u>passive avoidance</u> dimension.

Since factors three and four seemed conceptually related, a three-factor solution was examined. Factor one was the destructive strategies dimension; factor two was interpreted as a general avoidance dimension (including items from both avoidance factors in the four-factor solution); and the third factor clearly represented constructive strategies.

The three factor solution was retained for the sake of parsimony and maximal factor reliability. Each factor was defined by items loading at least .50 on that dimension with no secondary loading greater than .30. Additionally, any item with a primary loading of at least .45 accounting for at least twice the variance of the second highest loading was retained. Only loaded items for each of the three factors were used in subsequent data analyses. Table 1 presents the retained items and their factor loadings.

Internal consistency of each factor was computed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability for factor one (destructive strategies), consisting of 14 items, was .86. Factor two (avoidance strategies) consisted of six items and achieved a reliability of .71. Factor three (constructive strategies), having seven items, demonstrated a reliability of .75.

Respondents then completed scales regarding perceived competence of self and partner. These data were not analyzed for the current study, but will be reported elsewhere.

The next instrument contained in each questionnaire was Hecht's (1978a) interpersonal communication satisfaction inventory. This instrument is a reliable and convenient outcome measure of the interpersonal communication process, and it is a significant criterion of communication competence (Hecht, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c). It contains

19 items descriptive of the recalled conversation. Reliability was .88 in the current study.

Finally, respondents completed the interpersonal solidarity scale (Prisbell, 1980; Wheeless, 1976). This measure contains 24 items tapping the affective domain of interpersonal relationships. Respondents were asked to indicate their overall perceptions of the interpersonal relationship they shared with their conversational partner. The interpersonal solidarity scale demonstrated a reliability of .93 in this study.

Both of the above scales--communication satisfaction and interpersonal solidarity--were comprised of seven-interval Likert-type items. All items were scaled from one (strongly agree) to seven (strongly disagree). Positively worded items were reversed before data analysis so that higher scale scores were interpreted as higher levels of satisfaction and solidarity. Missing values for each item were coded as "four," the neutral mid-point.

Data Analysis

Hypotheses one, two, and three predicted that measures of satisfaction and solidarity would be more positively associated with constructive conflict message strategies than with either destructive or avoidance strategies. These hypotheses were tested by calculating *t*-tests of the differences between correlation coefficients for correlated samples (Hotelling, 1940). The critical value of the test statistic was 2.326 because (1) each test was one-tailed; (2) degrees of freedom were equal to 225 (i.e., n - 3); and (3) the level of significance was set at .01. The conservative alpha level was established to protect against the inflated experiment-wise error rate associated with multiple *t*-tests.

Hypothesis four predicted that interpersonal solidarity would add a unique contribution to the prediction of communication satisfaction when added to the predictors of conflict message strategies. Stepwise multiple regression was conducted to establish the unique contribution of interpersonal solidarity. Practical significance was established such that the incremental amount of variance accounted for by interpersonal solidarity was required to be at least five percent.

Results

Hypotheses one, two, and three entailed two *t*-tests each, for a total of six tests. In all cases, the calculated *t*-statistic exceeded the critical value (2.326).

Hypothesis one predicted that one's communication satisfaction would be more positively associated with one's use of constructive conflict message strategies (r = .306) than with the use of destructive strategies (r = -.418, t = 7.830) or avoidance strategies (r = -.242, t = 6.085). The findings supported this prediction.

The second hypothesis projected that one's partner's communication satisfaction would be more positively associated with one's use of constructive strategies (r = .245) than with destructive strategies (r = -.309, t = 5.662) or avoidance strategies (r = -.132, t = 4.025). The data supported hypothesis two.

Hypothesis three was supported as interpersonal solidarity was more positively associated with constructive conflict message strategies (r = .240) than with destructive strategies (r = -.025, t = 2.608) or avoidance strategies (r = -.128, t = 3.923).

Hypothesis four predicted that interpersonal solidarity would add a significant unique contribution to the prediction of interpersonal

communication satisfaction above and beyond the predictors of conflict message strategies. Stepwise multiple regression was conducted with interpersonal solidarity being entered after constructive, destructive, and avoidance conflict message strategies. The overall multiple regression coefficient was significant ($R = .53$, $p < .05$). The unique contribution of interpersonal solidarity was statistically significant ($F = 15.624$; $df = 4, 223$; $p < .05$) and met the established criterion of practical significance, though not impressively. The squared semi-partial correlation between interpersonal solidarity and communication satisfaction was exactly .05. The multiple regression is summarized in Table 2.

Discussion

Collectively, the findings of this research indicate that the use of constructive message strategies in interpersonal conflict tends to produce positive affective outcomes; specifically, interpersonal communication satisfaction and interpersonal solidarity. By the same token, the use of destructive or avoidance conflict message strategies is significantly less likely to yield satisfaction and solidarity, and may even be inhibitive of these outcomes. In all cases, correlations between the outcome measures (satisfaction and solidarity) and constructive message strategies were positive, whereas the correlations between the outcomes and destructive strategies were negative. Further, all correlations between avoidance strategies and the outcome variables were also negative.

Perhaps the most salient question regarding the data is why the magnitudes of the correlation coefficients are so low. The greatest amount of variance shared between a strategy and an outcome was 17.5 percent (communication satisfaction and destructive

strategies, r = -.418). But the low correlations are not totally surprising. Several factors suggest why greater chunks of variance are not accounted for in the outcome measures. First, regardless of the communication strategies employed, interpersonal conflict is not a particularly pleasant or satisfying situation. This is not to deny the necessity of engaging in interpersonal conflict, nor is it to deny the many positive functions it can serve. However, the inherently adversarial nature of conflict and the accompanying risk are likely to temper affective relational outcomes. So using constructive strategies in interpersonal conflict does not guarantee a high level of satisfaction, or even any satisfaction at all. But the use of constructive strategies will result in relatively more positive (or less negative) affect compared to the use of other strategies.

Second, as the multiple regression analysis displayed (see Table 2), the variance accounted for in communication satisfaction is greatly increased when several strategy categories are simultaneously used as predictor variables. The use of strategies tends to be complex, and communicators typically use combinations of strategies. Outcome variance due to different communication strategies seems to be somewhat additive.

Still, a large amount of variance is unaccounted for after considering communication strategies. We are lead to question what else other than communication behavior contributes to positive affect in interpersonal conflict situations? It may be possible that global interpersonal perceptions are equally or more important than specific communication behaviors in determining relational outcomes. For example, ratings of perceived competence alone

account for about 50 percent of the variance in communication satisfaction--nearly double what communication strategies accounted for in the current study (Spitzberg, 1981). Furthermore, a post hoc analysis in the current study using the same measures of competence as the Spitzberg study (1981) revealed that the contribution of communication strategies to the prediction of communication satisfaction was largely redundant with perceptions of competence. In other words, when such perceptions are included as predictor variables, the unique contribution of communication behaviors becomes negligible. Future research will have to address the complex and interactive nature of behavioral and perceptual processes more clearly.

It was predicted that interpersonal solidarity would be a significant unique predictor of communication satisfaction above and beyond conflict message strategies. It was, minimally. But the relatively small amount of unique variance accounted for (5%) may call into question the assertion by Koren et al. (1980) that generic relationship perceptions are as good a unique predictor of conflict outcomes as communication behaviors are. But several alternative explanations should be considered. First, since this study was delimited to interpersonal relationships with at least a modicum of intimacy, it could be that a restriction in range of solidarity scores accounts for the unimpressive correlations it exhibited. Examination of descriptive data indicated that although solidarity scores ranged from 36 to 168 (range = 132), the distribution was quite skewed ($\bar{X}$ = 139.158; std. dev. = 23.865; skewness = -1.566). Therefore, a sample consisting of different kinds of relationships and a wider range of intimacy levels might allow solidarity to

account for a larger portion of variance in the outcome measure. The comparable variable that was so significant in the Koren et al. (1980) study was the classification of distressed and nondistressed marital couples. Hence, the range of the predictor variable in that study was maximized, while the range of solidarity in the current study tended to be minimized. In any case, in situations of interpersonal conflict, interpersonal solidarity does not have much unique predictive utility when communication satisfaction is the criterion variable.

The fact that communication satisfaction was the outcome variable regressed on interpersonal solidarity in the current study may suggest an additional interpretation of solidarity's weak influence. Communication satisfaction measures the affective state of an interactant regarding the communication process that took place in a specific conversation. Since communication satisfaction is an episodic outcome variable, it may be relatively unaffected by long-term relational perceptions. Other non-episodic outcome variables such as relationship satisfaction may be affected to a greater extent by interpersonal solidarity. Solidarity should certainly not be discarded without linking it to other relevant criterion measures.

Also, since the current study focused on recalled episodes, a measure of current interpersonal solidarity may be insensitive to an episodic association between communication satisfaction and interpersonal solidarity. Hecht (1978d) found that perceptions of satisfying behaviors varied between recalled and current conversations. The same effect may operate on relational perceptions as well. This underscores the need to investigate naturally occurring conflict

episodes where possible.

A number of limitations circumscribe the validity of the findings in the current study. In particular, the sample was not generated randomly. Respondents were volunteers and may have been unique as a group in some way. Moreover, the representativeness of the sample is restricted in terms of age and geographic location. Generalizability of the results is tempered by these considerations.

Perhaps a more significant limitation of the data inheres in biases associated with self-reports. Perceptions of behavior in recalled conflict episodes may not accurately reflect actual conversation behaviors. Further, the kind of behavior that is recalled, as well as the type of conflict situation that is remembered, may be biased. For example, avoidance behaviors may be perceptually less salient, and consequently recalled less frequently or less clearly. It is also unclear to what extent frames of reference are similar for different couples experiencing interpersonal conflict. The normative significance attached to a particular behavior by one dyad may be substantially different from another dyad.

A number of future research concerns are logically salient. First, additional studies of the relationships between communication behaviors and relevant criterion outcomes must be undertaken. Conflict, and other situational forms need to be researched in depth. This will allow the comparison of behaviors and outcomes in different classes of situations, which will in turn, facilitate the development of a more precise theory of communication competence and message strategy use.

Second, other outcomes of communicative interaction need exploration. But more work is required in the way of conceptually

and operationally defining appropriate outcomes of various situations first. For example, Smith (1981) argues that we need to develop more appropriate and refined measures for the outcomes of conflict.

Finally, the self-report methodology utilized in the current research needs to be compared and validated with behavioral observation data. While self-report methodology enhances the ecological validity of data, the internal validity is questionable when one considers the many biases intrinsic to self-reports.

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TABLE 1

Interpersonal Conflict Message Strategies:
Varimax Factor Loadings for Retained Items

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Insult the Other Person	.57*	.14	-.06
Calmly Discuss the Issue	-.57*	.00	.18
Use Threats	.50*	.18	-.13
Shout	.71*	.00	.03
Make the Other Person Feel Guilty	.61*	.19	-.02
Act Defensive	.49*	.04	-.02
Punish the Other Person	.56*	.26	-.14
Be Hostile	.72*	.03	-.16
Get Angry	.74*	-.14	.05
Lose Your Temper	.78*	.03	-.03
Escalate the Conflict	.61*	.16	.02
Criticize the Other Person	.72*	.09	-.16
Intimidate the Other Person	.58*	.17	-.07
Call the Other Person Nasty Names	.52*	.14	-.13
Avoid the Issue	.07	.52*	-.17
Pretend to be Hurt by the Other Person	.24	.51*	-.04
Try to Postpone the Issue as Long as Possible	.09	.48*	-.08
Tease the Other Person	.22	.50*	.08
Ignore the Issue	.07	.58*	-.12
Try to Make the Other Person Jealous	.30	.55*	.00
Compromise with the Other Person	-.16	.01	.49*
Explore Alternative Solutions	-.14	.03	.46*
Seek a Mutually-Beneficial Solution	-.12	-.15	.56*
Reward the Other Person	-.01	.28	.52*
Negotiate with the Other Person	.01	.06	.67*
Seek Areas of Agreement	-.13	-.03	.56*
Express Your Trust in the Other Person	-.27	.03	.55*

* indicates primary factor loading

TABLE 2

Multiple Regression of Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction On Conflict Message Strategies and Interpersonal Solidarity

Variable	R	R^2	R^2 change	r	BETA	F
Constructive Conflict Message Strategies	.306	.094	.094	.306	.165	7.47
Destructive Conflict Message Strategies	.470	.221	.127	-.418	-.347	30.30
Avoidance Conflict Message Strategies	.480	.231	.010	-.242	-.073	1.38
Interpersonal Solidarity	.530	.281	.050	.291	.234	15.62